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AUTHOR Schreiter, Bonnie; Ammon, Paul
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ABSTRACT

A study focused on teachers' developing knowledge about their work, particularly the thinking of eight elementary school teachers from a racially mixed San Francisco Bay Area school district about the use of literature contracts in the classroom. The study examined ways in which teachers' prior beliefs influence their use of a new teaching strategy (assimilation) and the ways teachers' use of the new strategy impacts their belief system (accommodation). In a series of interviews, two of the teachers discussed their initial use of literature contracts in reading instruction. A developmental stage model was designed to aid in describing the development of educators' thinking in terms of assimilations and accommodations and the way teachers' understandings of teaching evolve from relatively simple to more complex. (Interview questions are attached.) (RS)

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Teachers' Thinking and Their Use of Reading Contracts

Bonnie Schreiter and Paul Ammon
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

This study focuses on teachers' developing knowledge about their work, particularly the thinking of eight elementary teachers about the use of literature contracts in the classroom. The purpose of this paper is to examine (a) the ways teachers' prior beliefs influence their use of a new teaching strategy, the use of literature contracts (assimilation), and (b) the ways teachers' use of the new strategy impacts their belief systems (accommodation). A developmental stage model is presented describing the development of educators' thinking in terms of assimilations and accommodations. The model also describes the ways teachers' understandings of teaching, and children's learning and behavior evolve from relatively simple to more complex. The discussion of assimilation and accommodation focuses particularly on the case studies of two of eight teachers who discussed, in a series of interviews, their initial use of literature contracts. The implications for promoting the development of teachers' perspectives through inservice training are discussed.

Teachers' Thinking and Their Use of Reading Contracts

This study reports on two areas of teacher thought: (a) the relationship between teachers' prior beliefs about learning and teaching and their use of a new instructional practice, and (b) the potential for development of teachers' knowledge from relatively simple to more complex, more adequate perspectives through their experience with a new practice. The purpose of this paper is to describe the ways teachers' prior beliefs influence the use of a new teaching strategy (assimilation), and the ways teachers' use of a new strategy impacts their belief systems (accommodation).

The present study concentrates on elementary teachers' thinking about language arts instruction. Language arts, with an emphasis on reading, was chosen because teachers devote a good deal of their classroom teaching time to improving students' reading performance (Goodlad, 1984). Literature contracts were selected as the target teaching strategy for this investigation for several reasons. Although literature contracts are "new" to most teachers who follow a traditional approach to reading instruction, they are already used by many elementary teachers and are generally perceived as relevant to classroom reading instruction. Contract use, in conjunction with a more traditional reading program, demands that teachers integrate the two methods into a single program for students. The use of contracts also requires increased teacher decision making (e.g., altering the present reading schedule, changing student learning objectives). Thus examining elementary educators' beginning use of contracts presents a good opportunity to study teachers' thinking about student learning and reading instruction. The study of reading contract use is also timely. Literature contracts reflect the current interest in introducing more literature into classroom reading programs as suggested, for example, in Becoming a Nation

of Readers (1985) and in the State of California's English-Language Arts Framework (1986).

A literature contract, as used by the teachers in this study, is a structured unit, composed of several sections, focusing on a specific book, author, or theme (e.g., Charlotte's Web, Judith Viorst, or poetry). Each section is determined by a main story event or book chapter and includes a variety of literature extension strategies (Devine, 1989; Huck, Hepler & Hickman, 1987). The activities range from teacher-directed tasks (e.g., evaluative comprehension questions) to student-directed tasks (e.g., "make a diorama of a scene you can visualize"). Students work on one section at a time, beginning the next when their work on the prior section is completed. A time line is usually constructed by the teacher to insure that all the contract activities are completed. Finally, contracts may be used with individual students, although they are typically used with small groups of children whose interest in a particular topic, for example, is the basis for forming the group.

We frame our study of teacher thinking in terms of a developmental model of educators' perceptions of teaching and learning. This stage model allows us to interpret the ways in which eight teachers transformed the use of literature contracts according to their prior beliefs about children, learning, and teaching (assimilation). The model also enables us to interpret the ways the teachers' prior perspectives showed signs of changing from relatively simple to more complex understandings as they tried using literature contracts (accommodation). The discussion of assimilation and accommodation focuses particularly on case studies of two of the teachers. We conclude this paper with our recommendations for promoting the development of teacher thinking about the classroom use of a new instructional strategy and for further research.

Teachers' Thinking and its Development

We believe that teachers' thinking has the potential to evolve from relatively simple, single-factor explanations of what happens in the classroom to more complex, multi-factor explanations. Ammon, Hutcheson, and Black (1985) and Hutcheson and Ammon (1986, 1987) propose a developmental model describing five sequential levels in the reorganization of teachers' thinking about child behavior, development, learning, and teaching. The theoretical model is intended to be general and, therefore, does not specifically address educators' thinking about reading. In principle, the model is applicable to teacher thought about teaching of all subject contents at all grade levels. The model does not imply that a teacher will think about all content, or all aspects of teaching, in the same way at the same time: It describes the progression in a teacher's predominant way of thinking about teaching and children's learning.

At level 1 of the developmental model, teachers characterize children of different ages as being more or less mature or easy to work with. Teachers attribute variations in children's performance to differences in experience, exposure to facts and attitudes, and innate characteristics (e.g., stubbornness). Student learning is believed to result from exposure to specific facts, rules, and attitudes. Thus teaching is viewed as showing, telling, and exposing students to what they need to know. Teachers rely upon their experience of what works and on the advice of experts (other experienced teachers, textbook teachers' manuals) to determine the content and methods of instruction.

Level 2 teacher conceptions include references to general stages of development, but the character and causes of change are described in terms of students' performance on specific activities and are attributed to specific experiences. With regard to children's learning, it is believed that students

acquire not only facts, rules, and attitudes (level 1), but also skills and procedures for finding correct answers. Learning results from a combination of imitation and practice with opportunity for corrective teacher feedback. Teachers believe that new learnings are contingent on the student's general stage of development and on prerequisite knowledge specific to the assigned task. Instructional content is still determined by experts, but teachers are more likely to use packaged curricula when the material is in accordance with their intuitions about the systematic sequence of learning tasks. Teachers are eager to include learning activities that provide information on what students can and cannot do.

Levels 3, 4, and 5 do not enter into the discussion of the data presented here, and therefore, need only to be summarized even more briefly: Level 3 represents teachers' notions of explicit and general stages of development which are perceived as discrete and static in nature (e.g., a child is at the Piagetian stage of concrete operations). Student learning results from some combination of hands-on activity and maturation. Level 4 teacher thinking reflects a new focus on the learner's consolidation of existing knowledge structures. Teachers' earlier concerns about general stages of development have given way to an understanding that the student's knowledge develops with respect to particular contents. Level 5 understandings include the notion that children are motivated by the need to make sense of the world through a cycle of repeating interactions between their mental structures and the environment. At these later stages of thinking, teachers are sensitive to the effects of teacher-learner interactions and the implications for their own ongoing cognitive development.

The developmental model is based on clinical interviews with preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in a two year graduate program that emphasizes

understanding children's development as a basis for teaching (Ammon, 1984; Black, 1988; Black & Ammon, 1982). We believe that the qualitative reorganizations described in the five levels can be found as teachers actively reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices, assimilating new experiences to the beliefs that characterize their current levels and accommodating their beliefs to specific experiences.

Method

Subjects

Eight elementary teachers, employed by a San Francisco Bay Area school district, participated in this study. All eight teachers taught in culturally and racially diverse elementary schools. The teachers volunteered to take part in this study while participating in a two day, district-sponsored workshop on the development and use of reading contracts with elementary students. Each classroom teacher planned to start at least one reading contract with his or her students while participating in this semester-long study.

Four of the eight teachers were not familiar with the purpose, structure, or classroom implementation of contracts. Two teachers were familiar with reading contracts. They had either borrowed contracts from colleagues or they had attended other, similar workshops and had written and used their own contracts. The remaining two teachers were regarded as reading contracts experts by their peers.

Interviews

Each teacher was interviewed before beginning a new reading contract with students. The first interview focused on the teacher's beliefs about reading instruction and children's learning. Teachers were asked why they had chosen to use contracts. The two contracts experts were asked to describe their

experiences with contracts, including how they had first used contracts and how they used them now. Teachers' pre-workshop (if any) and post-workshop contracts were collected. The second teacher interview recorded the six workshop participants' evaluations of the contract concept and of students' progress on the contract. Teachers were urged to explain any changes they had made in their use of contracts and to discuss their plans for the remaining weeks of the contract. The two experts did not participate in the second interview because their use of contracts was well in place. The questions used in the third teacher interview were developed to examine the teachers' evaluations of the contracts and students' learning. All eight teachers participated in the final interview.

The interviews with teachers were recorded on audiotape and by hand on interview questionnaires. After each interview and before the next, a copy of the hand-written notes was sent to the teacher. Teachers were encouraged to use these notes as a prompt in the next interview(s) and to elaborate on any points that seemed unclear or missing. At no time, however, did any teacher add to the material from an earlier interview session. The interview questions appear in the appendix.

The Reading Contracts Workshop

Three elementary educators, recognized by their colleagues as contracts experts, organized and led the workshop. They began the two day training by presenting the rationale for using reading contracts. It was shown that current research on the teaching and learning of reading indicates that the frequent use of literature in classroom reading instruction enhances students' basic reading and comprehension skills. It was said that the use of reading contracts heightens students' interest in reading while introducing appropriate literature.

The presenters also maintained that the format of the reading contract enables teachers to emphasize the richness of a story or book without re-teaching the study worksheet format each time a new book is introduced. The format of a quality contract includes seven components: a motivational pre-set, a schedule, vocabulary development, questions, creative activities, culminating activities, and group discussions.

The classroom applications of contracts were discussed and, toward the end of the second day, participants were given time to write individual reading contracts. Contracts written by the presenters and other district teachers were made available to participants for additional activity ideas as teachers wrote their own contracts.

Results

Case studies of two of the eight teacher participants are presented here to illustrate how teachers in this study interpreted the contract concept and implemented it in their classrooms. Matt Nelson and Tina Miller (not their real names) were chosen for discussion because they had different ways of thinking about teaching and student learning and different ways of implementing contracts. These two teachers were also chosen for certain similarities. They were both beginning teachers, worked with lower elementary grade students in comparable schools, and were new to the contract concept.

Matt Nelson

First interview, June 3. Matt discussed his reading program. Students were expected to memorize or sound out words on flashcards, read the basal stories, and answer the story comprehension questions (characteristic of level 1, showing, telling, and exposing students to reading content; and level 2, practice and imitation cause student learning, as described in the developmental model). Matt

expressed concern that most, if not all, of his students complete the five first grade basal texts before advancing to second grade (level 1, reliance on packaged curricula to determine the pace of teaching and learning). Matt attributed variations in students' progress in the five basal texts to differences in their exposure to specific skills and attitudes (level 1): "It has to do with the [students'] parents. I was exposed to reading and that's how I learned to read. These kids just don't have parents who expose them to reading. [The students] just watch TV."

Matt chose to use contracts to "expose students to different skills" (level 1, show, tell, and expose; level 2, learning results from practice and activity), such as looking up words in the dictionary and writing answers in question-answer form (e.g., Question: What is your favorite season? Answer: My favorite season is...because...). Matt sensed that these particular skills were problematic for younger students: "That's the hard thing about contracts because [the students] are first graders. So, sometimes they do it, sometimes they don't." Matt emphasized, though, that his objective was to expose students to these skills, "without pushing them" (level 1, exposure to skills, facts, and attitudes). Do his students need to be pushed? "On taxing assignments, [the students] just quit even though they can do it. They won't keep working. When I push them, they do it. I guide them as they work and I make them do it and that's why they finish their assignments."

Matt viewed contracts as "basically another way to add to the basal, another technique to keep reading from being boring." Matt added that the only difference between using basal reading texts and contracts is "that they are different techniques for teaching. Students are just writing down the answers to the questions instead of telling me." He was, however, concerned about students'

"time away" from the basals as they completed contracts (level 1, reliance on packaged curricula, advice of experts).

Matt described his expectations for student learning on the contract. He predicted that students would learn the important skills of finishing their work on time and looking up words in the dictionary (early level 2, reference to global skills, component skills not yet analyzed). Matt planned to evaluate students' work on the correctness and completeness of their answers.

Second interview, June 24. Matt began this interview by stating that there were no significant alterations to his initial planning in the three week interim: "I've kept right to the plan." The second interview, however, was dominated by his concerns about becoming more flexible in his contract planning next time. He found that school activities (e.g., fire drills, assemblies) interrupted students' work on contracts and caused delays in their progress. These interruptions led him to conclude that he should "plan one day at a time," rather than planning the entire contract schedule at the beginning (level 1, what works with students: level 2, what students can and cannot do).

As Matt looked over his students' work during the interview, he realized that he had a better understanding of students' abilities as a result of using the reading contracts: "Next time I'll do the first whole [section] with the students, then I'll plan for the rest of the contract....I can see now what these students are capable of doing" (level 2, what students can and cannot do). When he introduces a new contract next year, Matt plans to teach dictionary skills a week before starting the new contract. He believes that "intense teacher instruction" (level 1, exposure to skills and facts: level 2, new learnings contingent on specific prerequisite knowledge) will eliminate the problems his students experienced this time. Matt also noticed that students were struggling

with the question-answer (Q-A) format. He had "carried this format over to other assignments--weather assignments, for example" to give students additional practice in this skill (level 1, did not delete activity used by experts: level 2, learning results from practice).

Matt's frustration with student performance on contract tasks was evident: "If they don't know the answer, they won't keep working. They just stop even though they can do it....When I push them, they do it. I don't know why this happens" (level 1, show, tell, and expose, children characterized as adult-like and difficult to work with). To elicit student cooperation on difficult contract assignments, Matt modeled the correct procedures: "Then everything goes well....This works because I show them it's not that hard. If they would just read the [work], they would get the right answers." Matt did not have any plans, beyond modeling the task, for assisting children in "reading the work to get the right answers."

Third Interview, July 15. Matt began by describing his system of evaluating students' contract work. In the first interview, he expected learners' answers to be accurate and complete. Matt emphasized in this third interview that he decided to "measure success purely by who completed [the contract]. Everyone had smiling faces if they even attempted the assignment" (level 1, what works with students).

In general, Matt considered the contract an effective and interesting addition to his regular reading program. Will he use contracts again? "Oh, yes. If the students are ready for the primer, they can do a contract. These students can handle long stories and work independently. They can read the directions and they're at that stage of being more accountable." What stage is that? "They're at the primer level" (level 2, general stage linked to specific activity). Next

time, Matt plans to change the dictionary skills element of the contract. He will use a word list given in the district reading continuum and "jumble up all the words" for dictionary practice (level 1, advice of experts: level 2, learning results from practice and activity). Matt also plans to use a different book for the contract. Although the vocabulary in the book he used "introduced students to a lot of new words" (level 1, exposure), it was too advanced for most first grade students (level 1, what works: level 2, what students can and cannot do). Finally, Matt had a better notion of his students' work and decided to plan a book chapter and the corresponding contract section at a time, rather than rely on day-to-day contract planning (level 2, what students can and cannot do).

Tina Miller

The second teacher described in this section, Tina Miller, thought about and implemented reading contracts in very different ways. For Matt, the contract was an interesting addition to his regular reading program. For Tina, the contracts allowed her to extend students' writing and thinking about reading in ways that the basal reader and workbooks could not.

First interview, April 29. Tina described her first year of teaching. She thought students learned to read by completing the basal stories and workbook pages. After a short time, Tina became dissatisfied with basal readers. It seemed that the stories were meaningless and the workbooks did little to develop the skills students need: "How does circling answers on a workbook page teach students to write?" She incorporated enrichment materials, such as SRA kits, into her program. She believed, though, that her students' writing skills did not improve and students' interest in reading was low (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures). At the suggestion of several fellow teachers, Tina decided to learn more about literature contracts.

After Tina attended the workshop, she believed contracts individualize student learning and enhance student choice: "Students will choose how to work on it....and will be able to work at their own pace." Tina decided not to include the timeline or calendar component of the contract this time. She stressed that "the hardest part of a contract" is scheduling students' learning because "certain children can complete the contract more quickly than others. I'm not sure how long it will take. It's not my style to put a timeline on this....I'm feeling my way this first time" (level 2, what students can and cannot do). Tina also emphasized that contracts foster higher level thinking in a way that "really promotes thinking and evaluating reading, not 'fill in the blank' activities."

As she wrote her first literature contract, Tina relied upon her experience with children to determine which contract tasks to develop and include: "I thought about what's appropriate for my students" (level 2, what students can and cannot do, appropriate task). She also listened to the ideas of fellow teachers and perused other workshop contracts in order to create or choose appropriate contract activities. She expressed a concern for teaching all the skills of reading (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures) and planned to incorporate important reading skills (e.g., sequencing) into the contract. When Tina talked about the specific activities she planned to include, she stressed that first and second graders were not prepared to look up dictionary definitions: "This is a better task for third graders." Instead, she planned to ask students to illustrate story words.

Tina intended to use the contract with her second graders because these students are "good readers and independent workers. It isn't appropriate for first graders. They don't have the skills, the maturity, and the independence"

to complete contracts successfully (level 1, maturity; level 2, prerequisite learning of specific skills). Tina expected her students would need help with the contract, especially the written sections: "They're real good at following my verbal directions....and filling in the blanks." To prepare them, Tina had already started working with her students on reading and following directions and responding to written questions in sentence (Q-A) form. Tina also prepared students for contracts by assigning a mini-contract, a strategy suggested to her by a colleague. She asked students to read a popular children's book and to complete several related comprehension questions. She believed this transitional activity successfully prepared children for the longer, more complex contract she would soon introduce (level 2, new learning contingent on specific prerequisite knowledge). Tina planned to evaluate students' work by assessing the improvements each child demonstrated in writing--"the meat of the contracts is the written questions"--and by determining "each child's enjoyment of reading" on the contract (level 2, what students can and cannot do).

Second interview, May 8. Tina discussed her students' progress on the reading contract. She believed that her students had learned to work more independently. They had also learned to respond to written questions in complete sentences (Q-A form), although they were "struggling with it." To help them with this, she corrected their work with them when they met every other day (level 2, practice with teacher feedback). Although she continued to evaluate students' work on an individual basis, Tina adjusted her expectations for student achievement: "I'm even more clear who are strong readers and workers. I am clearer about those who don't have the skills and maturity" to do the work (level 1, maturity; level 2, new learning contingent on specific prerequisite knowledge, what students can and cannot do).

Third interview, May 29. Tina summarized students' learning: "They gained the experience of enjoying reading, this was the main thing. Second, thinking and responding to questions are important skills they learned...and to work independently, that's the third thing they learned" (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures).

Tina discussed her plans for using contracts next year in conjunction with the basal readers. Tina believes that the contract format (e.g., in-depth questions, writing activities) provides a structure for thinking about "other lessons, even the basal readers." She plans to alter basal text instruction to reflect a greater emphasis on writing and higher level thinking. Tina intends to utilize the calendar component of the contract: "I will set it up ahead of time. I know what's realistic for them to do now" (level 2, what students can and cannot do). She will also assign a mini-contract several weeks before beginning this contract. Tina concluded by stating that "contracts integrate reading and writing more completely than the basal and the typical workbooks. I will definitely use them again to motivate students and build important skills" (level 2, emphasis on skills).

Discussion

Matt and Tina cognitively transformed (assimilated) the concept of reading contracts to match their perceptions of teaching and learning. Their interpretations affected every aspect of contract use in their classrooms, including the purpose of contracts, the objectives for student learning, the selection of tasks, and the pacing and evaluation of activities.

Specifically, contracts enabled Matt to add to his existing reading program: "Contracts are another way to add to the basal" (level 1, contracts seen as supplemental to packaged curricula). As in their daily work in the basal

workbooks, students were expected to complete each contract section independently, correctly, and on time. Matt determined how much work all students were to complete each day. Children who could not finish their work according to the schedule were expected to complete the assignments for homework. In the same way that Matt depended upon the basal for guidance in reading instruction, he depended upon the contracts written by others for activity ideas (level 1, advice of experts). In fact, he included difficult activities (dictionary work, Q-A) because others did, even though he predicted that children would experience problems completing these tasks.

Tina's assimilations of the contract idea allowed her to enhance and extend her existing reading program. In planning for regular reading instruction, Tina carefully considered students' ability levels and planned extra activities to develop and reinforce reading skills (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures). In her work with contracts, these same considerations were evident. Tina was initially reluctant to establish a contract timeline and emphasized that the amount of work each student could complete was her criterion for success (level 2, what students can and cannot do). Tina assigned quasi-contract activities to ease her students into the full-length contract (level 2, what students can and cannot do). Her interest in building reading skills (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures) was seen in her inclusion of specific sequencing and writing activities.

The complementary process of accommodation was reflected in Matt's responses during the second and third interviews. First, recall that Matt experienced conflict in his evaluation of student contract work. At the beginning, students completed difficult work correctly when he pushed them. As he used the contract, he became increasingly frustrated with the need to compel students to produce

right answers. By the end of the contract period, Matt rewarded any student effort with a smiling face. Although Matt had not created a new framework for evaluating student work by the end of this study, he found that his initial view of pushing students was no longer adequate. Second, as Matt's dissatisfaction with pushing students increased, his need to adhere to a rigid contract calendar lessened. He realized the usefulness of his daily assessments of students' work to determine the pacing of the contract (level 2, what students can and cannot do). As Matt became more aware of his students' work toward the end of the contract, he decided to teach one contract section at a time. Third, Matt seemed less concerned about exposing children to difficult tasks, specifically the Q-A format and dictionary use, by the second interview. Although he did not delete these activities entirely, students were given additional practice and, next time, "intense teacher instruction" (level 2, learning results from practice and activity, new learning contingent on specific prerequisite knowledge).

For Tina, the literature contract strategy matched so well with her prior beliefs that the use of contracts with her students seemed mainly to consolidate her present thinking. Specifically, literature contracts were described by the presenters as building basic skills, such as responding to written questions, and Tina chose to use contracts primarily for this reason (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures). The contract was also presented as an interesting way to motivate students to learn to read, and Tina had been concerned about motivating her students to read for some time before she attended the workshop. Finally, Tina was interested in individualizing student reading work and increasing students' ability to work independently (level 2, emphasis on skills and procedures), and contracts, as presented in the training, were recommended for

individuals or small groups, and for increasing students' independence in their work.

Implications for Training and Research

Teachers' work with new instructional methods is an assimilative and accommodative process. Teachers transform new information to match their implicit beliefs about the nature of children, learning, and teaching. Teachers' thinking about their work is also subject to transformation itself--from simple accommodations to complex reorganizations. The ongoing process of reorganization is recursive at each level of development, as teachers' beliefs, overall, emerge as more complex and more adequate.

From a teacher educator's viewpoint, helping teachers become more reflective in their thinking about the nature and purposes of education is central to the change process. Encouraging teachers to become more reflective includes providing opportunities for them to understand their interactions with their students in relation to a new method as adequately as possible, even if the particular implementations of the method appear inadequate from an observer's point of view. Teachers are also encouraged to articulate explicitly their prior beliefs while responding to questions pertinent to the teaching method in question: How do you currently teach (relevant subject area)? Are your present ways of teaching this satisfactory in some ways for you and your students? Are they unsatisfactory in some ways? How did you teach this before? Why did you change? How do you plan to implement the teaching method? Finally, reflection includes discussion with informed peers in the weeks after inservice training to rethink the initial interpretation of the instructional strategy (Clark, 1988; Guskey, 1986).

Additional research investigating the ways teachers assimilate and accommodate to new teaching methods is needed to advance our understanding of teacher thinking and its development. Further study might include documentation of the changes in teacher thought and action as a new method is attempted over an extended period of time and in a supportive situation. An examination of the changes in teachers would allow researchers to determine why differences in teacher development appear (e.g., the new method requires too little or too much change in some cases, a more optimal amount in others). With this information, ideas about the conditions that foster teacher development when a new instructional strategy is introduced could be tested in intervention studies of a more experimental nature.

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Appendix

Interview #1

Teaching reading

How have you taught reading in the past? How did students learn to read? How did you know?

Thinking about contracts

What did you expect to gain/learn from the contracts workshop? Were your expectations met?

What is a reading contract? What does it look like? Is your conception of what reading contracts are different as a result of being in the workshop? If so, how did the workshop training influence your thinking?

Planning to use contracts

Why do you want to use a contract in your classroom?

What do you expect to teach students using this reading contract--in language arts, in other content areas, in the affective areas of learning?

How did you choose this book? How did you/will you decide which activities to include?

Are reading contracts, in general, more effective than some other alternative methods? How are they more effective?

What do you think the advantages of reading contracts are for you, for students? What are the disadvantages for you, for students?

What do your students need to know to complete this reading contract successfully? How will you assess what you think students should know?

What will you do to prepare students for this reading contract? Do you expect difficulties?

How do you plan to schedule this contract?

Teaching reading contracts--the first day

How will you introduce the contract? What will you do and say on the first day? What will your students do and say?

Students and teacher working together

Which students will work on the contract? How will you choose these students?

Do you plan to monitor and check students' work? What will you do? How often will you do this? How will you know when students are having problems? Will certain parts of the contract be due on specific dates? How will you grade the contract--in parts or as a whole?

How will you know when students are successful on the reading contract? What will be your criteria for success?

Conclusion

You are helping me in my work. What/how do you hope to gain from the time we will spend together talking about reading contracts?

Interview #2

Have you needed to adjust your initial planning? In what ways? Why?

What have your students learned so far? How do you know?

What problems, if any, have students experienced? What seems to have worked for students? How do you know?

How do you know when a student is having a problem? How do you know when a child is doing well?

Have any of your students completed the contract? Is their work meeting your expectations? What will you have them do now? Does this change how you will plan contracts for the next several weeks? How?

Interview #3

What do you think your students learned from this reading contract?

How did you measure success on the contract? (Refer to Interview #1 notes)

How did you know if and when students were successful?

Will you use reading contracts again? When? Will you do anything differently next time? Will you change the contract in any way--format, activities, the book, different students, prepare students differently, pacing?

What seemed to work? How do students learn to read with reading contracts? Does this differ from the way students learned to read before contracts? If so, how?

What do you do to teach students to learn to read with contracts? Does this differ from the way you taught students to read before contracts? If so, how?